

## PLAN DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

Development of San Antonio's Parks and Recreation System Plan began in Spring 1997. The process was led by staff members of the Parks and Recreation Department and involved numerous meetings of the Parks and Recreation and Open Space Advisory Boards as well as citizens. The following components comprise the plan.

### ESTABLISHING GOALS, OBJECTIVES

To establish goals and objectives for the Parks and Recreation System Plan, the 1981 Park Master Plan was examined to determine which goals and objectives still remained valid. These were then combined with applicable goals and objectives stated in the City of San Antonio's 1997 Master Plan Policies (see Appendix I). The goals and objectives were then revised following a series of public meetings to reflect citizen input regarding the future of the parks and recreation system. As presented in this plan, the goals and objectives address both existing and future facilities and programs. They acknowledge the scope and complexity of San Antonio's parks and recreation system, the need to expand and adapt the system to meet the complicated and expanding needs of the community, and the importance of achieving these goals in partnership with other entities, both public and private.

### GATHERING PUBLIC OPINION

Two processes were used to solicit information from citizens about their interest and participation in the San Antonio's park and recreation facilities and programs. First, a formal survey of recreation activities was conducted by an outside consultant in 1996. This was followed by 14 public meetings held in June, July and November 1997, one in each of the ten planning subareas defined for the System Plan. These meetings assured that residents had the opportunity to share information about their specific areas.

The 1996 study of the City's recreation functions was designed to assist the Department in formulating goals and policies for its recreation programs. Adults and high school students were surveyed using questions about use of discretionary time, existing and future recreation facilities and programs, public outreach, and ways to improve service. The highest level of interest was expressed in lighted fields, hike/bike trails, and equipped playgrounds. Preferences were also expressed for new aquatic facilities and multi-purpose centers for indoor recreational activities.

Respondents indicated the need for:

- better marketing of Department activities
- safety and security at Department facilities
- modern equipment
- better maintenance of facilities
- equitable recreation opportunities for all San Antonians.

Preferences expressed in the formal survey proved to be consistent with citizen responses gathered at the 1997 public meetings. The 14 public meetings provided staff members the opportunity to visit personally with citizens. Participants were asked to provide information about their facility and program preferences using the same ranking process included in the 1996 recreation survey. Additional verbal and written comments were also solicited, and participants were urged to ask other interested individuals to submit their comments to the Parks and Recreation Department.

Responses reinforced the public's interest in hike/bike trails. They also stressed the need for more natural resource areas and the desire to leave existing parks, or portions of these parks, in a more natural state, allowing for nature observation. Public meeting participants indicated a strong interest in individual and informal group pursuits as opposed to more organized, formal recreational activities.

#### THE PARKS AND RECREATION FACILITIES AND PROGRAMS INVENTORY

Another critical element in determining system-wide needs is an up-to-date and complete inventory of all public park and recreation facilities in Bexar County. A survey of these facilities was conducted for the Parks and Recreation System Plan and included properties of the City of San Antonio, 22 other incorporated cities, Bexar County, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, National Park Service, City Public Service, and 16 independent school districts. Existing inventories compiled by the City of San Antonio and Texas Parks and Wildlife Department were updated using mailed surveys, telephone interviews, and site visits. Information on previously uninventoried facilities such as those of 16 school districts was gathered using mailed surveys. The compiled inventory data may be found in both the subarea chapters as well as in Appendices C, F, and G.

Because the Parks and Recreation System Plan is a comprehensive document addressing both facilities and programs, an inventory of the City's current recreation programs was also compiled using written surveys completed by each of the Parks and Recreation Department's six divisions. In this way, the plan content varies from that required by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department for compliance with its planning process. This approach is, however, essential to a balanced plan that addresses the complicated relationship of facilities and programs within San Antonio's parks and recreation system. The compiled inventory of recreation programs currently offered by the City of San Antonio may be found in Appendix D.

## CLASSIFYING PARK FACILITIES AND RECREATION PROGRAMS

To assist in studying San Antonio's parks and recreation system, each park facility and recreation program was assigned to a classification type defined for the plan. Park classifications are generally based on size, use and type of facilities. Nine categories of park land were defined, three more than were used in the 1981 plan. The additional categories—natural areas, greenways and historic facilities-- reflect trends that have emerged in the past 17 years.

Recreation programs were also classified for the plan. Each program was defined and classified according to content, targeted age groups, and time and place that it is offered. Current City programs include those related to athletics, golf, youth, adult and senior citizen recreation, after school activities, volunteers, and cultural activities. These programs are may be grouped in five overall categories—adult annual or seasonal, youth annual or seasonal, and special programs. Overall, the City currently offers 20 different program types, and within those types, 75 specific programs.

## NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Because cities are so diverse in size and characteristics, it is difficult to define a standard to judge the exact extent to which a parks and recreation system meets the needs of its users. A commonly used measure of service as it relates to parks is a goal defined by number of acres per 1,000 population. The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) recommends 10 acres per 1,000 population as a goal. This plan references the 10:1,000 standard for the city as a whole and each planning subarea, and makes recommendations for acreage acquisition based on that ratio.

It must be understood that the 10:1,000 acreage goal accumulates all park acreage and does not differentiate between a neighborhood park, for instance, and open space acreage. It also does not take into account which entity owns or operates the property. Though this comparative measure can be instructive and serve as a guide, it is important to judge the unique needs of San Antonio as a whole, as well as each of its 10 planning subareas, when planning for future park and recreation facilities and programs.

The recommended service goal of 10 acres of park land per 1,000 residents was used as one measure of need when evaluating San Antonio's parks and recreation system. Using the park facilities inventory and city and subarea population estimates for 1997, 2002, and 2007, a ratio of park land per 1,000 population was calculated for each of those three years. This information is supplemented by responses received through surveys and at public meetings, as well as by demographic and social statistics gathered for this plan.

Complicating the assessment of how well San Antonio meets its residents' needs is the lack of generally accepted benchmarks by which to judge recreational facilities and programming. The Texas Outdoor Recreation Plan (TORP), issued by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department in 1990, attempted to measure recreational facilities and programming throughout 24 statewide planning areas. TORP judged performance based on various measures including number of recreational acres, number of recreational facilities, the existence of a park land dedication ordinance, and level of funding. The performance of cities was ranked based on statewide averages of these measures.

When compared with other Texas cities, San Antonio ranked low in number of recreational acres and facilities, and the plan recommended that the City adopt a voluntary dedication program and enter into partnerships with private organizations to acquire additional land. Because the TORP has not been updated recently, current comparative data is not available.

While the measures used in the TORP are quantitative, it is also important to weigh other factors when developing recreational facilities and programs. In order to plan wisely for future parks and recreation facilities and programs, it is important to understand the demographics and social profile of the community that is to be served. It is equally important to understand the age and composition of the population, as well as various indicators of social needs including juvenile crime, births to teenage mothers, and educational levels. By understanding these factors, the Parks and Recreation Department, through its facilities and programs and in partnership with other departments and agencies, can establish a more integrated approach to serving community needs. This information is summarized in the following subarea chapters.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for future park and recreation facility and program development are based on the measures and indicators of need as stated above. Recommendations address the unique needs of each part of the city, taking into account current service levels, demographics, social statistics, natural resource assets, and needs expressed by subarea residents.

## PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

General guidelines to prioritize recommendations for future development of facilities and programs were established based on public input, the extent and condition of current facilities, and demographics. The recommendations were then prioritized by year through 2007.